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Forbes

Artist Zoë Buckman Revives Her Feminist Body of Work In Latest London Exhibit

By Tanya Klich February 12, 2021



The 35-year-old artist has leveraged the art of embroidery, and boxing, to create feminist-inspired works of art.
ZOE BUCKMAN

Call it a virtual homecoming for Zoë Buckman. Her latest exhibit, titled “NOMI,” kicks off today at the Pippy Houldsworth Gallery. It will be the British-born and Brooklyn-based artist’s first-ever solo presentation in London.

Her latest works were created over the course of the pandemic. But the global lockdown wasn’t the only influence on her latest exhibit. Her mother’s death in January 2019, a pilgrimage to India, and experimentation with EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, a form of psychotherapy intended to treat those suffering from traumatic memories) are reflected in her latest pieces.

“This work is really an exploration of an internal force of joy, freedom, and creative expression that I believe lives within us all and transcends our external experiences and conditions,” says the 35-year-old.

5 Ninth Avenue, New York, NY, 10014 | gallery@fortgansevoort.com | (917) 639 - 3113

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"Familial Filth," part of Buckman's NOMI exhibit, showcases her love for embroidery and incorporating vintage fabrics such as household linens, and in previous works, lingerie and wedding dresses.

ZOE BUCKMAN

Buckman's pieces will be on display through March 12 and viewable via virtual showrooms. The gallery will also feature other renowned female artists like Nigeria-born Toyin Ojih Odutola, who will engage in live Q&As with the gallery's curators to discuss their latest bodies of work.

Buckman is known for exploring the imbalance of power and gender violence, as well as installations that honor and praise the feminine. Her multi-media consist of textiles, embroidery, and other items collected from the unlikeliest places to inspire feminist art, from her late mother's cupboard to a gritty boxing gym.

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From Buckman's *Heavy Rags* exhibit (2018): The home, her mother's kitchen and the boxing gym are just some of the places Buckman collects materials.

ZOE BUCKMAN

NOMI is largely a revival of her groundbreaking *Heavy Rag* (2019) and *Rave* (2018) series. She says it was crucial to revive both, as its feminist themes continued to resonate more than ever after the pandemic and economic downturn led to a surge in domestic violence and gender inequality. Like NOMI, the previous series explored the domestic space, and began with her embroidering snippets of text and poetry onto vintage dish-clothes and tea towels.

"My series *Heavy Rag* came about when I started to write a piece of text weaving together things men had said to me and things other women had shared with me pertaining to sexual violence, bleeding, bruising, and the attempt to cover up what is," she explains.

Her palette then evolved from domestic doilies to full-on fight gear. "I wanted to explore the complexity of the female experience, looking at the inevitability of having our power taken away from us, but also looking at the resilience and power of what it means to be a woman, and so the sculptures made from boxing gloves and domestic textiles really explore what unites us."

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The limiting and confining conditions of 2020 triggered memories for me of the times I've been held back, literally or symbolically, by patriarchal forces." --Zoe Buckman
ZOE BUCKMAN

She first discovered the beauty of boxing gloves in 2015, when she began training at Church Street Boxing in downtown New York City. The equipment made its way into her artwork the following year, as things were building up for the general elections, culminating in the surfacing of Donald Trump's lewd 2005 comments about groping women whenever he wanted, to the Women's March of 2016.

"At the time things were building up for the general elections so it felt like there was this war on women and it was also a time I was separating from my marriage," says Buckman, whose marriage with actor David Schwimmer ended in divorce in 2017. "I needed a space and practice to help me channel internally. So I went deep into boxing to be trained how to hold our own space and take space from someone else."

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Knockout Beauty: "& Ganga Water Glistens" is a featured piece in NOMI.
ZOE BUCKMAN

In NOMI, she also further explores the use of ink-staining to raise more awareness about the silence that pervades the domestic abuse of women. "Social and religious constructs have labeled it as something that has to be covered up and the parallel here is the literal removal of stains of fabric is a very female-centric experience."

She walks us through her process: "I embroider these words on textiles and then wet textiles and drop ink on them and watched how the liquid unpredictable bleeds out. The stains couldn't be contained or controlled and that felt like a liberating, exciting way to make art."

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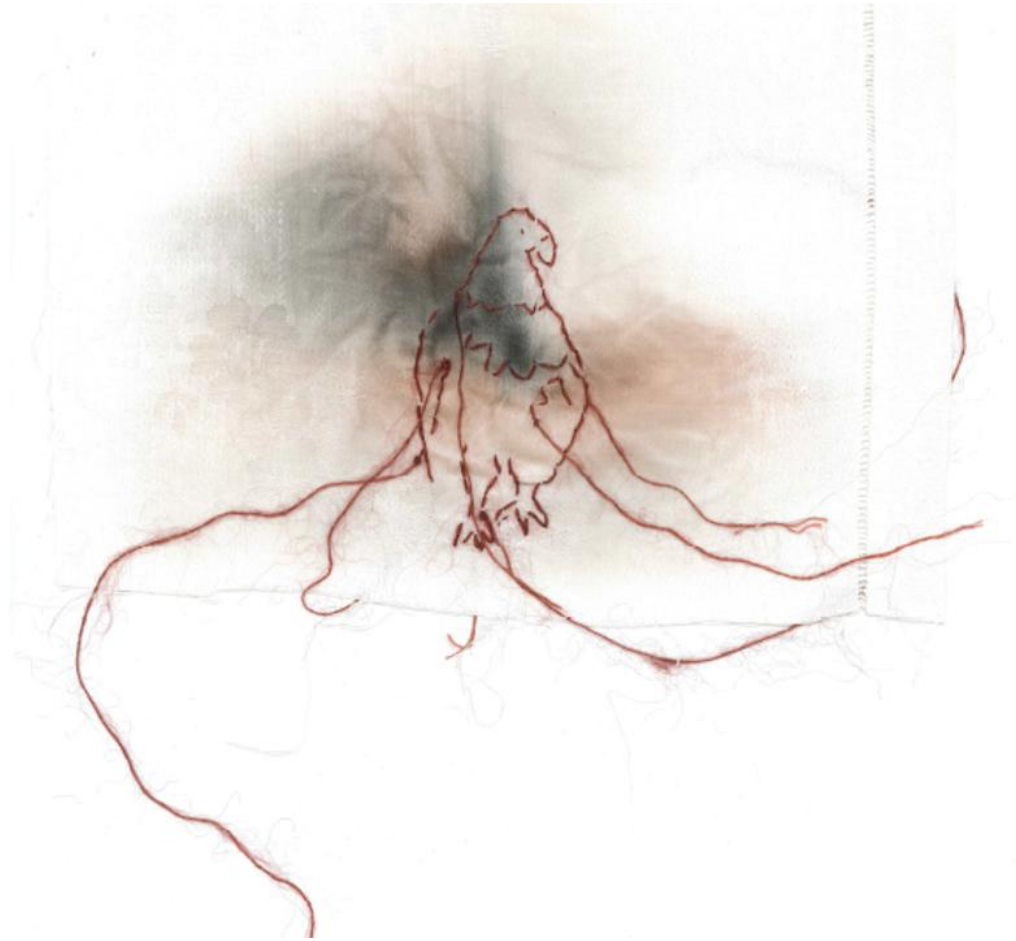


Experimenting with Ink Staining: "But slapsies was a blueprint" from Buckman's latest NOMI exhibit.
TODD-WHITE ART PHOTOGRAPHY

But Buckman did not work in complete isolation through the pandemic. She found ways to (safely) collaborate with peers and emerging artists through the National YoungArts Foundation (YoungArts). Last month the organization debuted *Together a short film*. YoungArts commissioned the animated short featuring creations by YoungArts award winners as well as notable guest artists and educators including Buckman, KAWS and Shepard Fairey.

The short stars more than a dozen animated birds, each one hand-designed by a renowned artist in their signature style. It is meant to convey a message of solidarity and interdependence within the global creativity community. "When YoungArts asked me to create a bird of the short film it was perfectly in line with what I was making at the time," says Buckman. "For my series *Nomi* I'd been collaging and embroidering different predatory animals such as snakes, wolves, and large birds, who for me symbolize different aspects of one's inner wild feminine." *Together* consists of more than 1,500 individual digital frames that are each a one-of-a-kind piece of art, all of which will be available for purchase for \$175 per frame to support YoungArts and the next generation of artists.

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Buckman's Bird: The embroidered/illustrated bird that she created for the YoungArts fundraising campaign.
YOUNGARTS

Buckman explains why YoungArts is a critical movement. "I grew up within the state school system in East London, where my voice and any artistic or creative leaning was squashed and shamed more than it was nurtured within the education system," she says. She adds that the ethos of the organization gives her great hope for the winners, some of whom she had trained and lectured as part of National YoungArts Week.

She has advice for all female artists, be they members of the YoungArts program or not. "Have each-other's back as much as possible," she says. "Patriarchy has us thinking we are all in competition with each-other, that shine is finite and there isn't space for us all. This ideology is killer for our creativity as well as our inner peace, so we gotta fight against that."